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Un pensionar al CGIL

Note privind câteva extrase dintr-o relatare a vieții și activităților individuale

Rezumat

Acest articol reconstituie câteva fragmente din biografia personală a lui Renzo Baricelli; a fost un sindicalist al fabricii Pirelli-Bicocca în perioada grevelor masive cunoscute ca Toamna fierbinte (1968-1969). Se pune accent pe ideile sale privind munca în industrie, a rolului Federației Sindicatelor Italiene (CGIL) și a posibilității de a transforma o „revoluție” în „profesie”.

„Astăzi”, Renzo Baricelli poate fi considerat membru al unei generații, unită printr-o comunitate de amintiri; totuși „ieri”, a fost parte a unor puternice subiectivități colective ca partidele politice și sindicatele. Acest articol se concentrează asupra unei analize a relatării vieții lui Renzo Baricelli fără să reducă structurile colective – având ca țintă acțiuni politice și sociale – la noțiuni de individualitate – persoana care își amintește de sine însuși.

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A Pensioner of the CGIL Notes to a Few Excerpts from an Individual Life and Work Story

Summary

This article reconstructs some excerpts of Renzo Baricelli's personal biography; he used to be a trade unionist of the Pirelli-Bicocca factory during the period of massive strikes known as Hot Autumn (1968-1969). Emphasis is given to his ideas on industrial work, Italian Trade Union Federation (CGIL) roles and to the possibility to turn a „revolution” into a „profession”.

„Today” Renzo Baricelli can be considered as a member of a generation, held together by a community of memories; however, „yesterday” he was part of strong collective subjectivities as political parties and trade unions. This article focuses on an analysis of Renzo Baricelli's life story not reducing collective structures – aimed at political and social actions – to a notion of individuality – the person who remembers himself.

A Pensioner of the CGIL² **Notes to a Few Excerpts from an Individual Life and Work Story**

Prologue

It was the 3rd of October 2008, a rainy morning in Milan (Italy). At the start of an ordinary day, I was walking hurriedly, with no umbrella, through the streets that connect the San Babila Metro station to my final destination - via Daverio, number 7. For on that day the Hall of Frescoes of the Humanitarian Society of Milan would be hosting the conference: "From '68 to the *Hot Autumn*. Struggles at Pirelli, working conditions and involvement" organised by the Italian Federation of Chemicals, Textiles, Energy and Manufacturing Workers (FILCEM) and the Italian Trade Unions Federation (CGIL). Among others, taking part in the event there were the Secretary General of FILCEM's Lombardy Region, Roberto Bricola, the Secretary General of the Italian Trade Unions Federation, Nino Baseotto, and two historians, Lorenzo Bertucelli and Edmondo Montali. But there were also several „witnesses”, people who had in some way been involved in the workers' struggles of Pirelli-Bicocca at the time. I approached Renzo Baricelli (1934), one of the „witnesses”, and with a little trepidation I took advantage of a moment's hiatus that followed his speech and spoke to him, briefly and with some uncertainty, about the research project that I had started working on for my PhD research in Anthropology of Contemporary World at the University of Milano-Bicocca. Renzo Baricelli was interested in what I had to say but was bewildered by the greetings and the general chatter of the participants at the conference. So he wrote down his telephone number in my diary and told me to contact him to arrange a meeting in a more tranquil setting.

30th October 2008, on a windy autumnal afternoon in Milan I was going down the stairs of the working archive in via Breda 56 in Sesto San Giovanni. I was accompanied by Renzo Baricelli, with whom I had met up with a few minutes earlier at the local branch of the Italian Trade Unions Federation, just a stone's throw away from the archive.

I'd spent the entire morning rereading some notes I had made of the most salient extracts of his speech at the conference a few weeks before, and was trying to put together a semi-structured ethnographic interview that could, in the hours that he had made available to me, help me to better understand how a certain type of speech on the memory of the workers of the Bicocca district in Milan³ was structured. I was also especially keen to know if he could put me in touch with some of the ex-workers from Pirelli-Bicocca:

Renzo Baricelli: „Let's see who you can talk to about these things, I was a trade unionist and yes, I was also involved, even if I did come into daily contact with the people who worked within the walls of the factory, at the start we couldn't even get in to the place. You also have to talk to them, with the people who worked at Bicocca and who experience in person those conditions I told you about.”

It was that same day when I started the most markedly ethnographic part of my research journey. Between 2008 and 2014 there were to be many other similar meetings, in different places and with different people. Renzo Baricelli gave me his time, his energy, his “diabolic passion” (“*passionaccia*”) and his network of contacts.

² CGIL Italian General Confederation of Work is an Italian Trade Union.

³ The Bicocca district is located on the northern outskirts of Milan. Until the 1970s it was the headquarters of Pirelli Industries. Today, after a long urban transformation process, it is home to the business centres of various companies that operate in the services sector, and to research and training centres, including the University of Milan-Bicocca, together with several large residential complexes.

Introduction

In these pages I will try to reconstruct a few fragments from Renzo Baricelli's professional life, showing how a complex discourse on the idea of the relationship between the worker and the trade union worker is formulated. In so doing I intend to outline in detail the discrepancies between the two. What I am proposing here is a reflection that, based on an individual life story, focuses on how trade union work is narrated and, by broadening the horizon, questions the possibility of making a "profession" out of a revolution. Renzo Baricelli says: "We felt like professional revolutionaries, we aspired to becoming professional revolutionaries". These comments may sound, at first glance, oxymoronic. I will therefore try to clarify the emic means that the expression „revolutionaries by profession" implies, with the aim of metaphorically bridging the gap between the acute (ὀξύς *oxys*) and the obtuse (μωρός *moros*), describing how trade union commitment, narrated as closely tied to a certain idea of revolution, is told as a sort of career path.

In order not to reduce collective structures – aimed at political and social actions – to a notion of individuality – the person who remembers himself – I will read these excerpts from the work and life story of Renzo Baricelli in the light of the fragmentation in which he now lives. The context in which Renzo Baricelli provided his narratives is in fact that of modernity, even in this case, individual and collective. While, on the hand, Renzo Baricelli defines himself as a "retired member of the Italian Trade Unions Federation", who has, as we will see, dedicated his working life to safeguarding the rights of male and female workers in different Italian factories, on the other, he recognises how the current worrying employment situation in Italy is unable to find an appropriate measure for social intervention in the tools that ignited the struggle of the sixties and seventies.

The notion of generation allows me to place the emphasis on the collective dimensions of the individual career path of Renzo Baricelli, who was both protagonist and witness of the *Hot Autumn* struggles at Pirelli-Bicocca. Thus, following Ortner (2005), I show the collective and socially-constructed dimensions of individual subjectivity (Crane 1997) and to construct a profound social portrait by presenting a case study of anthropology at home. The conversations I had with Renzo Baricelli mainly took place in the Bicocca district of Milan, which is where I started spending my time at the start of the 2000's as a student at the University of Milan-Bicocca, which is located only a few miles from where I live today.

I am convinced that a critical knowledge of anthropology, in its relationship with history (Fabietti and Borutti 1998) and with memory (Fabietti and Matera 2000; Climo and Cattel 2002; Clemente and Dei 2005), starting by analysing the narratives of "common stories" (Jedlowsky 2001), can play a key role in understanding the social and economic changes of recent years. The objective of this article is in particular to show how memory is created and re-created, through different media and strategies, to give meaning to what is understood as the past, and to justify a certain social positioning in the present.

The article is divided into two sections. The first focuses on Renzo Baricelli's development as a trade unionist, tracking down through his narrative a few key elements that foster a certain idea of trade union work constructed through his experiences that precede his assignment at Pirelli-Bicocca. In the second section I will analyse Renzo Baricelli's trade union experiences at Pirelli-Bicocca. The complexity of the workers' struggles that affected the multinational tyre company during the *Hot Autumn* does not allow, in this context, for an exhaustive historical reconstruction. However, an analysis of a few events connected to the organising of strikes and protests, according to Renzo Baricelli's narrative, shows how the revolution imagined by the workers at Bicocca can be understood as the fruit of the work of a specific profession, such the trade union one. Trying to seriously consider the individual constructions of identity and social status, I decided to transcribe a few extracts of the conversations I had with Renzo Baricelli between 2008 and 2014 in order to underscore how, by updating his memories into stories, subjectivity emerges within a collective social space and time.

Renzo Baricelli's development as a trade unionist

In narrating his own life story, Renzo Baricelli equates one historic moment in his life with another: the start of his trade-union career and his leaving the Italian Communist Youth Federation (FGCI), a mass organisation which, at the time, in the Province of Milan alone, numbered between 20,000 and 25,000 members. When Baricelli reached the age of twenty-five in 1960, he was no longer eligible to be a part of the leadership of the Youth Federation. It was precisely when he was describing his refusal of several white-collar job offers and his becoming closer the world of trade unions that Renzo Baricelli first used the expression "Professional Revolutionaries" in our conversation. In his own words:

Renzo Baricelli: „There had been other offers of white-collar jobs, but I really didn't consider them. I, then..., we felt like professional revolutionaries, we aspired to becoming professional revolutionaries, because that was the political upbringing that we had received within the left, within the Communist Party. I joined the trade union in the early 1960s.”

This was during the time when Giovanni Tambroni was trying to put together a majority government with the support of the leaders of the Italian Social Movement (MSI), one which was capable of filling the power vacuum that had been created following the resignation of Antonio Segni. The protests of the young people belonging to the so-called "Striped-Shirts Movement", the organising of marches promoted by the Camera del Lavoro (Trade-Union Headquarters) and by the FGCI in Milan that followed the deaths and injuries suffered by many young people who protested against the return to a fascist-inspired government marked, according to Baricelli's narrative, his transition from activism in political youth to the world of trade-unionism. In particular, Renzo Baricelli was assigned to the provincial headquarters of the Italian Federation of woodworkers, construction workers, and those working in the extracting and allied industries (FILLEA), an organisation which formed part of the Italian Trade Unions Federation (CGIL) which, at that time, was identifying and organising a few uniform production sectors as a preliminary action to the opening of well-structured negotiations. The purpose was to find valid claims for all levels of production in the sector and therefore to gain workers' consensus more easily and a greater ability to influence negotiations.

While an approach into the world of trade unions usually represents a break with the past in the economy of the narrative of the self, Renzo Baricelli instead emphasised the continuity that characterised his approach to the trade union in his life-story. The years of political activism within the FGCI had made him familiar with a few realities of the factory floor, as he himself recalls:

Renzo Baricelli: „When I was in the FGCI, because we used to go and distribute fliers in factories where young people were working... in the 1950's there was a company called Ferrotubi in San Siro and I remember the first meeting that I had with the workers was at one of their meetings, and I was shocked because the meeting was in a bar and all the metal tube workers were there in their overalls, actual workers in flesh and blood that corresponded to the image of the worker that I had had. It was a good thing that my companion Luciano Guerri came with me and, buoyed up by him, I managed to talk to these workers: "What should I say to these guys? What should I teach them? Me, what?". And I remember this first contact I had, someone like me who was an outsider to them and who had to take the word inside, it really struck me and always made me reflect about an issue like this.”

Trade union work, despite being narrated here from an "external viewpoint" by Renzo Baricelli, is told as a series of almost pedagogical practices, connected to words and the ability to bring the word into the factory. These words, to which Renzo Baricelli refers, are the very entreaties of the workers themselves, arranged in narrative form by the trade unionists. Another aspect that Renzo Baricelli recalls from factory work in the early 1950s was the presence of women:

Renzo Baricelli: „Another recollection, in terms of being an outsider in the factory, and I talked about it recently too... you have to imagine... I was a young man full of ideals with only the slightest idea about politics, but anyway... on the 8th of March at Borletti, the 8th of March 1953 or 1954, I spoke to the gathering because then one of the few things that was significant at that time was the day of the 8th of March, at least in the big factories, where there was an approved half day off granted to women by internal agreement. In that factory, there was a strong trade union movement, a strong political movement and there was this gathering. I was a young man who went to that gathering with all the women there who had, of course, very short gowns - they were very unscrupulous - above all for someone who was not familiar with the factory environment. And I had to give a speech, disturbed by this very young and very unscrupulous female presence that perhaps took me for a ride just a little, almost certainly in fact, that's to give you an idea about what my approaches to the world of factories were.”

Renzo Baricelli recognises the role of female workers in Italian industrial production in the 1950s and 1960s, and notes how it had a significant political and social impact on the history of work in Italy. The trade union struggles that he remembers having lead did not pay special attention to gender differences except from a purely terminological point of view; distinguishing between male workers (lavoratori) and female workers (lavoratrici). Indeed, their bodies, their effort and their exploitation at the hands of the “bosses” were directed towards a struggle that was part of one social body, told from a male perspective.

While Renzo Baricelli highlighted the continuity between his activism in political youth and his trade union work, what marked the transition from one phase of his life to another was the meeting with Giacomo Bontempi. It was during his years of working within the FILLEA that Renzo Baricelli got to know a man who he himself described as „my teacher of trade unionism”: a former partisan commander and leader of the Federation of Italian Metalworkers (FIOM). From his experience in woodworking with his colleague Bontempi, Renzo Baricelli recalls a few aspects that, put into perspective what was happening within those factories at the start of the 1960s: a series of struggles motivated by a „very backward trade union state, and serious working and wage conditions”. Recalling another 8th of March, this time in 1961, Renzo Baricelli had placed the emphasis on the physical conditions of the male and female woodworkers in Electa, a factory in Lissone (Milan), which was specialised in the production of veneer and plywood:

Renzo Baricelli: „The thing that really struck me in Lissone, there too on the 8th of March, this time in 1961, was when I went to hand out leaflets in these two veneer and plywood factories. While I gave the workers the leaflet, they would hold out their hands to take it, and I took notice, and I was struck, by the actions; a very high percentage of them seemed to have mutilated fingers, that is an entire working class... because the work and the woodworking machines were also very dangerous for causing accidents to the hands in particular and so there was a huge number – it seemed like all of them in fact – that had cut fingers, and I was struck by the harsh reality of their work. I sensed how strong the exploitation was, and how serious their condition was.”

Between 1962 and 1963, while still working within FILLEA, Renzo Baricelli started to get involved with workers in the construction sector; “a different world” compared to the world of woodworkers. It was a working reality characterised by seasonal work fragmented into different construction sites where Renzo Baricelli identified some all-encompassing traits: the plight of the migrant worker, of the black worker, and the ever-increasing rate of accidents at work are remembered as the three major issues at the heart of bargaining negotiations.

Renzo Baricelli: „And so I started going onto the construction sites, I wasn't really allowed in there, I would go and maybe there was the canteen or a refectory in the larger sites, and there we started

to identify the workers' demands, which were especially connected to issues of safety, even if safety was an issue that was still very difficult to address at that stage. That was where I began taking personal responsibility for them, for submitting these requests, and I got some idea about how to broaden the issues that came out of the bigger construction sites so as to make something happen on the smaller sites. In practice we tried to impose negotiation through a kind of well-structured struggle in the construction sector."

The reality of work on these construction sites, during a boom in the public building industry, is recalled by Renzo Baricelli as being very different, compared to what he had to deal with in the woodworking factories. The social fabric of the workers, their fragmented geographical nature, the way the work was organised and the impossibility of coordinating a cogent struggle - as Baricelli himself recalls - did not allow for the suggestion that workers could refuse to work and just cross their arms for the first or last two hours of a shift, since „when cement had to be poured you couldn't just interrupt the work”.

Renzo Baricelli: „For me it was my first real undertaking of personal responsibility, because before there had always been someone who could help me. I always had Giacomo Bontempi who was in the office while I was an employee; that's to say that nominally I was secretary of the construction trade union, but there were these sector unions. Then we fought a struggle here in Milan and that's something that is worth recalling. What happened in construction? It was a tradition that once or twice a year there was a provincial strike with general claims, protests, against accidents, here and there, a rally in the Piazza del Cannone behind the castle and then, ahead of the autumn, there was another one. The construction industry was quite seasonal, and everything stopped then. Then you did something before the national collective agreement and there was another provincial agreement but connected to the so-called Construction Workers' Social Security Fund (...) That was how I learned about the job of being a trade unionist.”

After a few years Renzo Baricelli talks about moving to the chemical workers trade union (FILCEP), and in his first few years there managing small sectors like plastics and tanning in one area of the city. His role within the trade union organisation included responsibility for the vertical sectors and a territorial area featuring different sectors. Renzo Baricelli tells of having followed the struggles of the workers in the plastics industry in the south of Milan: within this area of the city there were the big factories like Montecatini-Edison (later Montedison) and the Pirelli factory in Via Ripamonti. In this case the strategy of a well-articulated struggle encountered its main obstacle in the monopolies of the big two Milanese companies. At Montecatini, for example, the establishment of an Internal Central Committee focussed decision-making in the hands of the company's management, leaving no bargaining space for the trade unions.

Renzo Baricelli: „There was one department - the Parathion department, the one for an extremely poisonous fertilizer that they then closed - and it was where I had my first experience in departmental struggles (...) in a monopolistic factory using the technique that I was then to put into practice at Pirelli some years later. This department had some horrendous working conditions, but I had a very good colleague within the Internal Committee, and we decided to call a strike; we submitted our demands, and the strike started at 4 in the morning. It was winter, it was cold, and the entry gate at Montecatini was far away, they had these... I mean the entrance from the road was far away from the factory. There was a road, a gate, a big courtyard and the factory; the strike succeeded for the first shift but those on the second shift were unable to strike because Montecatini had already intervened to block it. I learnt a lesson that day too: you always have to try to imagine what the reactions of the bosses might be to your initiatives. Before that I hadn't really thought about it too much but then I understood that it was not something that could be underestimated. One had to imagine what might happen afterwards and I learned that as well.”

Reflecting on his life story led Renzo Baricelli to rethink the meanings attributed to trade union work the years prior to his arrival at Pirelli-Bicocca. Trade union work within the big factories meant, for Renzo Baricelli, discussing with words – what the working conditions of thousands of male and female workers would be, and expressing – in words – what should become the routines of these people's daily life for a certain number of years.

Renzo Baricelli: Another thing that I have learned to appreciate, two things in fact - these are the teachings of Giacomo Bontempi: one is that an agreement - if he didn't teach me it I wouldn't have... that is to say, it is more difficult to manage on your own - you have to be open to an agreement and never put an end to it. In order to be considered valid politically, in the interest of the workers, you should never close a situation. An agreement that puts an end to a situation and that does not give prospects - i.e. „we struggled for this, we got this, and that's it, it's all done now” - does nothing but bring something home, but it's not a good agreement; the agreement has to open prospects, it has to provide possibilities. It's more difficult to make all the workers aware of this evaluation on the validity of the agreement, but that's how it is.”

And, following on:

The other aspect is the risk that agreements leave a section of the workers with a bitter after-taste in their mouths. The agreement never resolves everything and during the negotiations - since you're dealing with another party that is not unprepared, and that has a particular political vision - what matters, for one party and the other, is the balance of power that emerges from the agreement. Will we be stronger or will we be weaker? This applies to the workers but also to the opposing party. The agreement can never make everyone happy; at that point you have to decide: I can achieve this but, in the meantime, I realise that one section of the workers will not be satisfied. It's there that you have to be careful and maybe, achieve one less result generally but try to involve another part of the workers that risks getting nothing, and risks being excluded altogether. (...) We always have to try to imagine what the reactions of the bosses might be to your initiatives. Before that I didn't really think about it too much but then I understood that it was something that couldn't be underestimated. You had to imagine what would happen (...). Trade union work is not that simple a thing, and I learned that too.

The dynamism of the production situations in the first half of the 1960s, along with the political fervour that was expressed around the workers' struggles at that time made, in the words of Renzo Baricelli, the question particularly complex and dependant on the circumstances. However, what emerges from his tales seems to clarify some general characteristics attributed to the task that was assigned to the trade union organisation in Italy:

Renzo Baricelli: „Trade union work requires flexibility: you have imposed a certain thing, you have produced a result that depends on a number of forces in play and therefore you have to know how to take the situations. That is how I learned to be a trade unionist, there's no course where someone explains what you have to do; I have never taken any courses in my life: you learn if you are ready for it, if you have the passion, the ideals and some good teachers. And so you also learn to take responsibility, in the sense that you have to decide: the trade unionist not only has to decide when is the best time to fight, to strike, but also when the best time is to strike a deal. I learned you have to strike an agreement when you still haven't used up all your strengths, so when you're still growing you have to push to come to an agreement that will never be everything that you were originally asking for. You always have to mediate and it will always be a process of mediation, which depends on so many things: on your ability to interpret your power relations. However, let's say that in order to try to get the most out of an agreement you have to try to negotiate when you're still strong and when the opposing party is unable to assess how much strength you have. If you wait too long your strength begins to wane and the boss quickly realises this; you fall and if anything, you find yourself having to thank the other party that

allowed you to make a deal in the first place. I learned that you need to take responsibility, assess the situation and decide; sometimes you can't say „I'll think about it tomorrow". One day, 24 hours, and it may be too late, you may find yourself in big trouble and you won't take home the agreement that you negotiated with the commitment of so many.”

In this first section I have illustrated the characteristics of trade union work set out by Renzo Baricelli, on the basis of his experiences before his assignment at Pirelli-Bicocca.

While, up to this point, Renzo Baricelli's narrative recalled his training within the trade unions first in the woodworking industry, and then in the chemicals industry, it is with the recollection of his experiences at Pirelli-Bicocca that Renzo Baricelli will bring more sharply into focus what he himself defines as the features of trade union work within a big factory. In this case in fact, the activities related to trade union negotiations, and the organising of strikes and protests seem, in his tale, to show how it has been possible to conceive of a certain type of “revolution” in terms of a profession.

Being a „revolutionary by profession” in a multinational tyre company

Renzo Baricelli's arrival at Pirelli-Bicocca was decided upon by the secretariat of FILCEP, the chemicals trade union, who entrusted him to the tyre sector at a provincial level and the Bicocca area of Milan. Baricelli recalls having felt a certain pride for having been entrusted with the most important factory in Milan, of which he only had indirect knowledge. Renzo Baricelli recalls that even before he was entrusted with the Bicocca area, he got to know the reality of the big Milanese factory. In addition to being a symbol of emerging Italian capitalism, Pirelli-Bicocca was considered a centre of opposition to the fascism, witnessed in the collective memory of the part of the city that was the scene of the 1943 and 1944 strikes; from the deportation of hundreds of workers taken away from the different departments and delivered to the Nazi extermination camps, to the significant number of combatants in the patriotic and partisan formations and of the armed insurrection of 25th April 1945, which was aimed at saving the production factories from German looting. Renzo Baricelli remembers Pirelli-Bicocca as a sort of small town, whose streets were suffused by a collective memory that was also handed down to new employees. The identity of the Pirelli workers, together with the analysis of the working conditions in the factory, were the elements around which the struggles of the *Hot Autumn* of Pirelli-Bicocca were constructed. But the recollections that bind Renzo Baricelli's life story and work more closely with the Milanese tyre multinational are others; in his own words:

Renzo Baricelli: „I already knew about Pirelli, politically one knew what Pirelli was and also, my brother had worked there from 1948-1950 as a worker in the rubber department and then my aunt who lived with us, also worked there. My aunt, by the way, died right there on the pavement in Viale Sacra after leaving the infirmary. I remember that my sister and I had been to the Niguarda morgue to identify her body. Her death was strange: she was there at the infirmary, and they probably should have taken her to hospital - she had some health problems for sure - but they preferred to turf her out; „once they are out of here they are nothing more to do with us”, that was their policy at the time. We had this knowledge here, and then, perhaps, we went there as the FGCI to hand out flyers. Ah, as it happens I was familiar with Pirelli for something else, in another way. There was a worker whose surname was Lorenzini and who lived there in San Siro, where I lived. He had a daughter, more or less my age, who became one of my first - let's say - emotional experiences with the opposite sex. So there was also this relationship with Pirelli: she was also close, familiar, for family and sentimental matters. So I arrived there with these images of Pirelli in my mind but I knew absolutely nothing about what was or wasn't done there. But I'd already learned to be a trade unionist, I'd learned to seek out paths... for us, for me, the task of a trade union official was that of creating the Italian Trade Unions Federation's political line, which was that of a cogent struggle, of negotiating, of improvement.”

Also in Renzo Baricelli's narrative, just as in the narrative of other trade union activists, male and female workers (Gulli and Lana 2005; Barozzi and Beduschi 2008), when the account ends up telling of entry into the factory and trade union involvement, one is witnessing a change in the pronominal dialectics. If, by talking about his own training the narrator has used the first person singular, by narrating the social change brought about with trade union struggles, Renzo Baricelli and my other interviewees have begun using the first person plural. It is precisely this rediscovered link, recalled and re-updated in the narration, that is the element that enabled me to reflect on the notion of political affiliation:

Renzo Baricelli: „I had learned to seek out the paths... for us, for me, the task of a trade union official was that of creating the Italian Trade Unions Federation's line, which was that of a cogent struggle, of negotiating and of striving for improvement. My task, therefore, was to see what the problems were and to understand how we could organise ourselves. I was an organiser, I was an „AGITPROP” as we used to say once; I never call myself a „trade union leader” because leader... yes, you can also call it that... perhaps today you also need specific economics skills and knowledge... but forty years ago you needed this passion and you had to devote yourself, then you also had to have a few talents, communication skills for example. And that's when we started to see what we could do: there was dissatisfaction, but there was trade union division - but we'd said this before and you know them already - and so we started to imagine the factory and how to deal with Pirelli. The reflection was very clear: „...how do we deal with Pirelli?”; so then, talking with colleagues and with the workers there we tried to understand where to begin. And that's where I thought of something else that Giacomo Bontempi had taught me: if you're in a situation and you need to make a breakthrough, first of all you have to see if there are any rights that have not been respected and leverage those because, in doing so, you are asking for something that has already been achieved and is not being respected, you are asking for a right, which is something that you should already have.”

In this way a certain sense of affiliation to strong collective subjectivities is also apparent: the trade unions - the Italian Trade Unions Federation in particular - and the parties present within the sections of the factory. Renzo Baricelli, in this sense, recounted the era of 1968-1969 through the narrative of a battle, a conflict fought solely by two social protagonists: on the one side the workers, a collective subject directed by the unions, and on the other “the boss” (Rimoldi 2010).

Renzo Baricelli: „Our tactics were to demonstrate that, with every passing day, the struggle was spreading and never diminished in consensus and in the number of subscribers to the cause, also in terms of public opinion. This strategy was aimed at also increasing trust in those who didn't always have it and to demonstrate to the other party that their attempts at producing divisions weren't working, because the struggle would increase and grow in intensity and consensus. Our strength was that of having a direct relationship with the workers and telling them how things were. The strategy and the tactics were told to everyone and so the conviction that it was the right thing to do was borne out by what happened, it was a mutual thing: the facts strengthened us and strength produced further actions.”

The agreement of February 1968 granted the CGIL the use of the mandate, signed by the worker, with which the company was authorised to carry out a deduction from the salary in favour of the union⁴. In addition to the needs of the workers in the various departments that made up the great factory, the constant presence within the Bicocca district also represented, in the words of Renzo Baricelli, a key element in the creation of „class consciousness”.

⁴ Before formalising the instrument that delegated power to the CGIL, fees were collected in red boxes that were placed outside the factory's reception desk, on the pavement. The introduction of the mandate for CGIL was interpreted by Renzo Baricelli as a victory for freedom, a way for the trade union and its workers to get out of a world of secrecy by which they felt bound.

Renzo Baricelli: „So then we said: „Let’s stay there on the pavement”⁵, we’ll wait there and when they get here we’ll talk to them, you [party activists] will recognise them. There would be these brief meetings on the pavement of Viale Sarca. I always went there prepared, in that first I spoke at length with the activists and I explained things in a very meticulous way because, you know, sometimes it’s hard to explain with just words the actions that you are used to carrying out. It’s as if I asked you „how do you make polenta?”, and you said to me „fill a pan with water, bring it to the boil, etc.”, but you didn’t explain that it’s a dish made with a particular kind of flour etc. That was the key, and the workers believed it, we considered people’s needs section by section, but were ready to make a group agreement. This served to increase the trade union’s credibility, but the trade union is represented by people. The workers saw that after the words came actions, then trust grew and grew and then what happened, happened. But all of these personal aspects, the way of thinking about people, about their relationships with one another, that all stemmed from these things... And for me that is a wonderful thing to remember.”

It is this precisely this element that represents the purpose of the work of the trade unionist to Renzo Baricelli: making the male and female workers aware of their own condition of exploitation and, at the same, implementing a coordinated trade union plan of action aimed at improving those conditions. Pirelli-Bicocca was a factory made up of three big departments divided in turn into various sections which were each different in terms of working speed and work times and in terms of union strategy, what Renzo Baricelli realised was that it was necessary to put forward general requests that somehow took into account the conditions of the workers in general and of the workers in individual departments.

Renzo Baricelli: „There are many people who think that revolution is carried out by causing trouble: the more trouble you cause the more of a revolution it is... but not for true revolutionaries. They sent a questionnaire prepared by the activists of the Cinturato. Then it was printed on the „CGIL” headed paper. Everything was always printed on that kind of headed paper. The questionnaire was distributed and collected in a virtually secretive way. This was because we were not allowed to propose referenda and because we didn’t want the management to stop to it. There were a huge number of subscriptions, many suggestions, and a very broad consensus, even the question „are you prepared to fight in support of the demands?” received a unanimous yes, but many also added „as long as there are the three sets of acronyms”, we replied „you are the three acronyms”, the right to strike is about the workers, not about the initials of the trade unions.”

The idea of revolution, put forward by Renzo Baricelli, can be read on at least two levels: the first as the production of a class consciousness, the second as a series of public protests that find their *raison d’être* within the dimension of belonging to that same class and to the real relations in real contexts.

From a practical perspective, Renzo Baricelli recalls that trade union action during the *Hot Autumn* was organised on several levels. The first was that of analysing the relationship between work and salary; the second, more markedly economic, related to the purchasing power of the wages; the third, which was mainly social, concerned the amount of time dedicated to work in relation to the amount of production required⁶. The underlying idea of Renzo Baricelli’s work was that trade union action had

⁵ The pavement to which Baricelli refers is the pavement of Viale Sarca, opposite which there was one of the entry gates to Pirelli Bicocca. Until the approval of the Workers' Statute in 1970, trade union representatives were not allowed direct access to the factories. The pavement assumed a symbolic significance as the place where the struggle began, so much so, in fact, that it gave rise to the nickname "pavement trade unionists".

⁶ In the words of Renzo Baricelli at the 1968 conference of the "Hot Autumn. Struggles at Pirelli, working conditions and involvement" of the 3rd of October 2008: “The workers had little, but they all knew, as the adverts told them, that there were lots of lovely things to own and nice things to do: a car, a weekend away from home, holidays by the sea. The workers at Pirelli told me that they had neither the money nor even the time. They had to obey the discipline of industrial work: a first shift that started at 6 in the morning, a second shift that finished at 10 at night, then night-time from 10 'till 6; you started on Monday and you finished on Sunday morning. The work was hard and was carried out under difficult conditions - 12 days off in August, the controlling authoritarianism of the company and if injured yourself it was your fault and you were fined or suspended without pay. The same

in some way to convey a participatory process in improving the living and working conditions in the factory through the dialectic between trade union and “the boss”.

Renzo Baricelli: „You therefore had to assess the situation at a trade union level and see what was wasn't right, and there were plenty of things that weren't right, but above all there were the unilateral decisions taken by Pirelli four or five years before in 1964, that had de-indexed piece rates. Before 1964 piece rates were counted on basic pay and the cost of living allowance and, therefore, every time that the cost of living allowance varied - it was a time of huge inflation and therefore prone to large variations in the value of the allowance - the piece rates also fluctuated because they were linked to the cost of living allowance. To keep the remunerative value of the piece rates steady, it blocked this mechanism with a unilateral act and so in 1968 workers would have been entitled to around 50 lira per hour on average, because Pirelli passed a unilateral and arbitrary act. (...) Before, when base pay or the cost of living allowance increased piece rates increased not in percentages but in real terms. Pirelli put a stop to this mechanism; they said „the piece rate is no longer calculated on the cost of living allowance, it is locked to the current value”. The cost of living allowance continued to increase but there were no changes to the piece rate. This determined that, in a few years, according to our calculations people were paid 50 lire an hour each, that was a lot, no? So the demand corresponded to a right that had been taken away: that was how the workers understood it and we appealed to this.”

There are many ways in which I tried to organise the events which, through study of the reference literature (Magnani 2006; Maifreda et al 2006; Montali 2009a-b), seemed to have a certain relevance during the *Hot Autumn* at Bicocca. Similarly, on several occasions, my interviewees have tried to recall the past to allow me to understand what happened at Bicocca. What emerges is a clear idea of workers who refused to be defined solely by domination and by a hierarchical, subordinate relationship. They were in fact defined in relation to a series of actions characterised by a certain degree of autonomy and independence (or presumed as such) or better still, by a series of collective actions through which the workers themselves, the social protagonists, came into conflict with an opponent identified in the figure of „the boss”.

In general, through Renzo Baricelli's narratives, I have shown how the incidents relating to the *Hot Autumn* at Pirelli-Bicocca were constructed through involvement – whether direct or indirect – of the workers, appealing to the means of constructing social relationships between the trade union organisations and the workers and through what many of my interviewees recognised as being a “class consciousness”.

In the words of Renzo Baricelli, it is shown how the production of this class-consciousness, a prelude to what was perceived as a “revolution”, was tied to the involvement of the workers, to a formulated struggle, to the refusal of certain instruments that, in other contexts, characterised the trade union struggle. I have further shown how Renzo Baricelli's narratives contribute, despite the specific nature of the current situation, to the construction of a certain sense of self and meanings to working life in the different moments of social life. The narratives turn to past events, putting them into perspective and trying to explain the present as the decline of a certain type of grand past.

Conclusions

Nowadays Renzo Baricelli attends meetings, writes articles and testimonies about the history of the trade union and on his own personal story within it. His career within the trade union, while it led him for long periods to live far from Pirelli, from Milan and from the region of Lombardy, allowed Renzo Baricelli to recognise how he played a central role, even after his retirement; as he himself says,

thing would happen for other failures; if you were off sick you lost half of your pay, this was the life for an entire lifetime. You can understand how living like that was very unflattering and how everyone yearned for a more human life” (Renzo Baricelli).

he is “a pensioner of the Italian Trade Unions Federation”.

The attempt at digesting the changes – of the district, of how work and the trade union were organised – bring with them the need to direct the narratives following the script of a nostalgic and resigned memory that does not lose agency with regard to political actions in the present. If the transformations have changed the fabric of the Bicocca district and its redevelopment has led to the intersection of new forms of employment, of research and new production models within the area, one can recognise that they have also influenced the same means of building the life and working stories of my interviewees. Looking back in this case also means rebuilding the end of one’s career, a departure from the world of work.

It is therefore the prospect generated by retracing the life story of the present that justifies the professionalization of revolution in the stories told by Renzo Baricelli. The idea of trade union work, as part of a broader political and ideological strategy – the experiences of which are stratified and are grouped together – legislates, in my view, for the oxymoronic value that the notion of being a professional revolutionary would seem to represent. The strategies adopted during a career within the trade union, attempts at constructing cogent negotiations, and strategies implemented in organising strikes are, in my opinion, to be viewed as quiet revolutionary practices, where a real “reversal” was being prepared. Recognition of some of the features of trade union and factory work at Pirelli during the 1960s therefore entitle Renzo Baricelli, and the former employees of Pirelli Bicocca, who took part in the *Hot Autumn*, to talk about themselves as being professional revolutionaries.

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